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SUBJECT: FBI DIRECTOR MEETS WITH VICE MINISTER OF MINISTRY OF PUBLIC SECURITY

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: During FBI Director Robert Mueller's January 30 meeting with Ministry of Public Security (MPS) Vice Minister Nguyen Van Huong, the Vietnamese agreed to simplify and intensify information sharing in criminal matters and enthusiastically welcomed prospects for enhanced training provided by the FBI. Huong thanked the FBI for information shared with Vietnam concerning the cases of Nguyen Huu Chanh and his associates, several of whom have been convicted of crimes related to the bombing or attempted bombing of Vietnam's embassies abroad. Huong also briefly outlined concerns about groups which call for the overthrow of the GVN. Vice Minister Huong called the Director's visit a landmark step in bilateral law enforcement relations, and thanked the Director for inviting MPS Minister Le Hong Anh to visit the United States. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) FBI Director Robert S. Mueller III made a short visit to Hanoi on January 30, during which he met for 45 minutes with Ministry of Public Security (MPS) Vice Minister Nguyen Van Huong, who oversees intelligence and counter-terrorism (CT) issues. As a senior MPS official, Huong has been our highest-level interlocutor on bilateral law enforcement matters. He sees himself as the architect of our slowly expanding cooperative law enforcement relationship. Ambassador Michalak accompanied the Director.

¶3. (SBU) After opening pleasantries, Huong agreed that the United States and Vietnam share similar threats from transnational crime, including terrorism, drug trafficking, cyber crime and money laundering. He cited, in general terms, several instances in which the FBI and the MPS had cooperated in the past, and mentioned contacts with the DEA, but acknowledged that the current level of bilateral interaction was "modest." He praised the FBI as the leading agency in law enforcement in the world. Noting that economic growth would expose Vietnam to more types of criminal activity, Huong concluded that it is time for Vietnam to work more closely with the FBI.

¶4. (SBU) Director Mueller agreed on the benefits of, and need for, closer cooperation. He offered three specific suggestions: (1) that MPS agree to meet with the RSO and the Legatt on a monthly basis to exchange information on cases of mutual interest, and that this information be passed in a less formal manner than the current required diplomatic note; (2) that the MPS welcome additional training offered by the FBI, including slots in the FBI national academy; and (3) that Minister Le Hong Anh accept his invitation to visit the United States at a mutually convenient time to exchange ideas on the full range of law enforcement issues.

¶5. (SBU) Huong responded enthusiastically to the first two proposals and committed personally to brief Minister Anh on the third. Concerning information sharing, Huong admitted that the two nations had discussed deepening cooperation for several years, but that very little had actually happened during that time. He added that there

was no need to restrict exchanges to a monthly schedule, stating that USG law enforcement officials can come to Vietnam "without barriers" at any time there is an urgent need to exchange information. He also urged that both sides make the best use of "information technology" to speed communications. Vietnam hopes, through USG law enforcement officials, to be able to access "the FBI crime data base," and that Vietnam would - in turn -- share information with the United States. On the suggestion regarding training, Huong agreed with the Director that expanded training would help each side better understand the other, creating better conditions for effective cooperation. "Vietnam has gained some experience in fighting crime," Huong noted, "but we know the FBI has much expertise to offer." He added that Vietnam is now interested in joint operations, which training could enable. He promised to support the in-country training costs for Vietnam officials, adding: "you just send your experts."

¶6. (SBU) Huong then thanked the Director for information conveyed by the FBI during the previous month concerning investigations regarding Nguyen Huu Chanh and his associates, who are suspected of bombing Vietnamese diplomatic establishments. He then acknowledged Director Mueller's earlier comment that the United States and Vietnam do not see eye to eye on all issues, noting that there are groups which Vietnam sees as security threats, but that the United States considers benign. One such group is the "Viet Tan Revolutionary Party," Huong continued. Director Mueller explained the U.S. process of designating groups as terrorist organizations, which necessarily involves evidence of criminal activity and decisions within the State Department.

¶7. (SBU) In closing remarks, Director Mueller underscored our willingness to consider Vietnam's training needs, emphasizing that Legatt Laro Tan, stationed in the new FBI office Phnom Penh, would be visiting Vietnam on a regular basis and could engage in planning.

Huong proclaimed that the MPS has made a decision to "orient" itself more closely with the FBI as a priority. He called for a new focus on the "practical aspects" of bilateral law enforcement, and

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welcomed the chance to speak directly with his American counterpart.

¶8. (SBU) Comment: Vice Minister Huong's message - that the MPS is ready to engage in a regular, real exchange of information -- was clear and repeated several times during the short meeting. The strength of this commitment, which is new in our dialogue, will have to be tested. Our invitation to Minister Le Hong Anh came at the suggestion of Huong's people, and may be an element of his internal maneuvering to carve out more "space" for exchanges in the to-date slow moving development of the bilateral law enforcement relationship. End Comment.

¶9. (U) This message was approved by Leggat Phnom Penh.

MICHALAK